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A Sketch of Early Fort Wayne

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Colonel Robert S. Robertson

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A SKETCH OF EARLY FORT WAYNE

by

Colonel Robert S. Robertson

Prepared by the Staff of the
Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County, Indiana
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FOREWORD

This sketch of Fort Wayne's history was penned by its prominent adopted son, Colonel Robert S. Robertson. It originally appeared on the pages of the FORT WAYNE DAILY GAZETTE in August, 1879. The author hoped that his summary might induce others to contribute to a comprehensive history of Allen County.

The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County present this account in the hope that it will entertain and inform readers and will encourage further reading in our city's history. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation have been changed to conform to current usage.



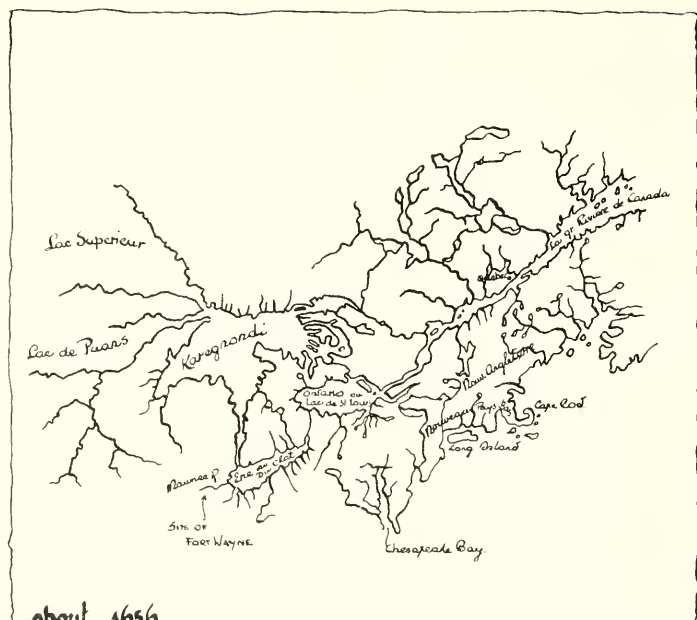
Col. Robert S. Robertson

ROBERT S. ROBERTSON

Robert S. Robertson was an early historian of Fort Wayne. He not only recorded events that occurred before his time, but he also made history for others to write. Born on April 16, 1839, in North Argyle, New York, he was descended from Scottish forebears. Admitted to the bar in 1860, Mr. Robertson began the practice of law at Whitehall, New York. At the beginning of the Civil War, he began his military career as a private. He quickly rose to the rank of first lieutenant. After his discharge because of wounds received in battle, Robertson was given the brevet rank of captain by President Lincoln and the brevet rank of colonel by the governor of New York. Later he received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his military services.

In 1866 Colonel Robertson came to Fort Wayne and began the practice of law. In 1867 he was elected city attorney for a term of two years. The next year he was the Republican nominee for state senator but was defeated. In 1871 he was appointed United States commissioner and register in bankruptcy. At the Republican Indiana convention of 1876, Colonel Robertson was nominated for the office of lieutenant governor. He was defeated in the election of that year; but he sought the office and was successful in the special election of 1886. His election precipitated a battle for political power in state politics. During his tenure, he was elected president of the State Board of Equalization, a position previously held only by the governor. Other honors came to him later in life. He was appointed a trustee of Indiana University, and President Harrison appointed him a member of the Utah Commission.

His published volumes include HISTORY OF THE MAUMEE RIVER BASIN, INDIANA REBELLION OF 1887, and VALLEY OF THE UPPER MAUMEE RIVER. "Educational Development of the Northwest" appeared in the MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY.



... a map prepared by M. Sanson,
 Royal Geographer of France,
 entitled "le Canada" or "Nouvelle
 France"

The early history of the country is a subject attracting the attention of many investigating minds. Now that a history of Allen County is being prepared, it is right that any persons whose investigations enable them to throw light upon the earliest history of Fort Wayne do so; the work undertaken by our county historians may then be as complete as possible. In the hope that it may induce others to add to the work, I contribute my mite in the following hasty sketch from notes made for my own use.

In deciding important questions in history, the value of maps is often overlooked, but they are frequently the only records of early explorations. An early map can prove that the site of Fort Wayne was known at an earlier date than any in recorded history.

In 1657 Nicolas Sanson, royal geographer to the king of France, prepared a map of Le Canada or Nouvelle France; Lake Erie is displayed with a river flowing into it from the southwest, clearly representing the present course of the Maumee River from the site of Fort Wayne to the Lake. The St. Mary's River and the St. Joseph River had not yet been explored. Thus, we have conclusive evidence that the Maumee River had been traveled to the vicinity of this point prior to 1657 by the indefatigable French explorers. The map is in possession of C. C. Baldwin, of Cleveland, and a reduced copy is reproduced in volume one of the AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN.

In 1680 the route to the Mississippi River, by way of the Maumee and Wabash rivers, is clearly referred to by Père Allouez in his letter of November 9, 1680, translated from the third volume of FRENCH DISCOVERIES of Margry:

"There is a river at the end of Lake Erie, ten leagues below the strait, by which we can traverse much of the road to the Illinois. It is navigable to canoes and is about two leagues nearer than the route by the St. Joseph and Kankakee rivers by which they usually go there."

On August 11, 1681, Sieur de La Salle, before starting on his second expedition toward the Mississippi River, made his will and devised the following: "Do give, cede, and transfer to the said Sieur Pleet in case of my death... as well as all my rights over the country of the Miami, Illinois, and others to... the Miami, in the state it may be at the time of my death."

The second volume of the MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY mentions another note from the pen of La Salle in 1682, which

reads:

"The fifteenth of January we struck the trail of those of our people whom M. Henri de Tonty had sent on a hunting expedition. They were searched for, and one was found. The other two had gone to make inquiries after me to the river of the Miami."

In WESTERN ANNALS, a report made in 1682 by La Salle to Frontenac mentions the route by the Maumee and the Wabash to the Mississippi as the most direct. Even though it was the shortest route, the explorers long continued to go around by the Lakes, sometimes descending by Green Bay and the Fox and the Illinois rivers; or they descended by the head of Lake Michigan up the St. Joseph River to the present site of South Bend, thence by portage to the Kankakee and down that river. Why they should travel this roundabout way so long has been a mystery until lately, when another unpublished letter of La Salle threw light upon it. It is well known that, about the time of the advent of the whites, the Iroquois confederacy was carrying on a war of extermination against the Algonquin tribes, of which the Miami and the Illinois were a part.

In his letter of October, 1682, La Salle said:

"I can no longer go to the Illinois country but by the lakes Huron and Michigan; the other ways which I have discovered, by the head of Lake Erie and its western coast, have become too dangerous due to frequent encounters with the Iroquois."

This letter is important because it shows that La Salle discovered the route. He stood on the future site of the populous city of Fort Wayne, when there was nothing to meet his view but the unbroken forest and the small cluster of Indian wigwams. Therefore, we may consider this disputed question settled, for La Salle was noted for reporting exact facts, and when he said that he had discovered the route, it may be taken as a fact.

My research of the period from 1682 to 1716 has revealed no direct mention of this route. In WESTERN ANNALS, it is stated that a route was established about 1716 from the head of Lake Erie, up the Maumee River to the site of Fort Wayne, by a portage to the Wabash, and by way of this river to the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

History and tradition inform us that in 1747 a French fort was destroyed at the junction of the rivers. If this be true, it must have been soon re-established; in 1749 Captain Céloron de Blainville, a chevalier of the Order of St. Louis, was sent by the Governor

of Canada, the Marquis La Gallissonniere, with orders to descend the Ohio River and take possession of the country in the name of the king. He descended the Ohio River to the mouth of the Great Miami River, burying inscribed leaden plates at various points in his route. He followed the Miami River to Fort Loramie, then across the portage to the head of the Maumee River. The MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY further reports:

"They completed the portage on the twenty-fifth [of September] and arrived at Kiskakon. This appears to be the Indian name for the site of Fort Wayne...Céloron found it to be a French post under the command of Captain M. de Raymond. It undoubtedly took the name of Kiskakon from a branch of Ottawas that removed to this place from Michilimackinac, where they had resided as late as 1682. It was here that Céloron provided pirogues and provisions for the descent of the Maumee to Lake Erie. The Miami chief, 'Pied Froid' ('Cold Foot'), resided in the village. He appears not to have been very constant in his allegiance either to the French or the English. Leaving Kiskakon on the twenty-seventh of September, a part of the expedition went overland to Detroit, and the remainder descended the river by canoe."

A map of Céloron's route, prepared by Father Bonnecamps, who accompanied the expedition, shows with considerable accuracy the courses of the St. Mary's and the Maumee rivers. The fort is located in the bend of the St. Mary's south and east of the river. According to the map, and in agreement with existing traditions, the fort stood somewhere not far from the residence of Honorable Hugh McCulloch. In 1751 Marquis de Vaudreuil-Cavagnal mentioned "Fort Miami on the Maumee." This must have been our Fort Miami; for, although there were in the West four outposts named Miami, the other "Fort Miami on the Maumee" was not built until early in 1794 by the British. No event of importance occurred here for thirty years or more. This post remained in the condition in which George Croghan found it until Fort Wayne was built and garrisoned in 1794.

But as early as 1785, Washington wisely discerned the importance of the place. He wrote that same year to Richard Henry Lee:

"Would it not be worthy...of the wisdom and attention of Congress to have the western waters well explored,...at least as

far westerly as the Miami River, running into the Ohio River, and the Maumee River running into Lake Erie, and to see how the waters of these communicate with the river St. Joseph, which empties into Lake Michigan and into the Wabash River? For I cannot forbear observing that the Miami village...points to a very important post for the Union."

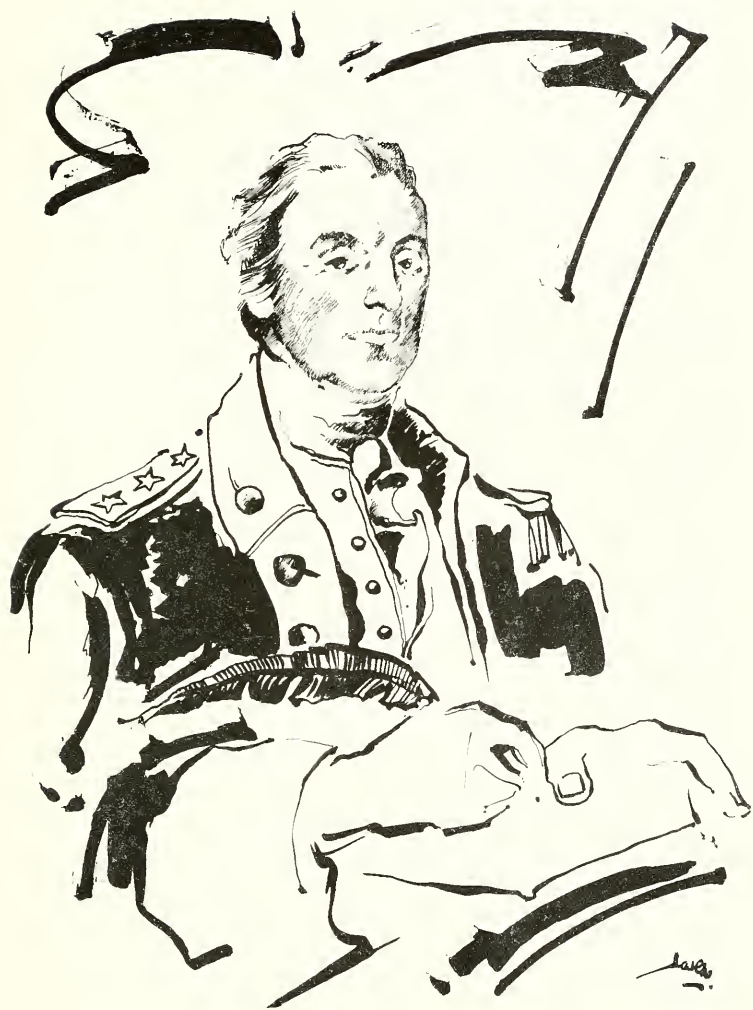
In his treasonable letter of 1789, General James Wilkinson proposed to send articles from Detroit through Lake Erie to the Miami River and then by the Wabash River to any point on the Ohio River. In 1790 Antoine Gamelin was sent from Vincennes to visit the Indian villages on the Wabash River; he proceeded as far east as Kekionga, the Miami village at the junction of the St. Joseph and the St. Mary's rivers. LeGris was then chief of the Miami. General Joshua Harmer's expedition reached the Miami, or the Omee River, on October 14, 1790; he engaged the Indians at the "common fording place" of the Omee and was defeated. The AMERICAN STATE PAPERS contain a letter of General Henry Knox to General Arthur St. Clair dated September 14, 1790. General Knox writes that the great object of this campaign was to establish a strong military post at the Miami village, had it been compatible with the public finances.

In 1791 General St. Clair was sent on a similar errand. Knox, then Secretary of War, gave him the following instructions for the campaign:

"The force contemplated for the garrison of the Miami village and for the communications has been set between one thousand and twelve hundred noncommissioned officers and privates, and the garrison must have in store at least two months' supply of salted meat and flour in proportion."

In WESTERN ANNALS, we learn that he adds, "It is hardly possible, if the Indians continue hostile, that you will be suffered to establish a post at the Miami village quietly."

St. Clair left Fort Hamilton; and on October 12, 1791, he commenced to build Fort Jefferson, in Darke County, Ohio. On the twenty-fourth he resumed his march to the head of the Maumee; on November 3 he reached a stream which he supposed to be the St. Mary's, but it was really a branch of the Wabash just south of the headwaters of the St. Mary's. Here St. Clair was attacked by the Indians under Little Turtle. He suffered a disastrous defeat and



WASHINGTON WROTE TO RICHARD HENRY LEE ...

was obliged to retreat with the loss of several high-ranking officers. The famous Brant, or Thayendanegea, was present at this battle.

On the twenty-sixth of December in the same year, General Knox again recommended the establishment of a strong military post at the Miami village. In 1792 Reverend Samuel Kirkland was sent as an envoy to the western Indians. One of the points he visited was the Miami village to urge the Indians to make peace and to learn what number was engaged against St. Clair. According to the AMERICAN STATE PAPERS, Captain Trueman was sent from the Ohio River to the Maumee River, on May 12, 1792; but he was murdered by a man and a boy he met while hunting.

The next military activity was General Anthony Wayne's campaign of 1794. It was his plan to reach Au Glaize, the headquarters of the Indians, undiscovered. To deceive the Indians he cut two roads, one toward the foot of the rapids, and the other to the junction of the St. Mary's and St. Joseph rivers. He pressed forward between the two. However, the Indians had learned of his movement from a deserter and had abandoned their towns.

On August 18, 1794, his army advanced forty-one miles from Au Glaize and, nearing the enemy, threw up light defenses, which they called Fort Deposit. On the twentieth they moved five miles down the north bank of the Maumee River, where they were attacked by the Indians in the heavy timber. There were less than nine hundred troops engaged against two thousand Indians. The Indians were driven back two miles through the timber and took to flight. Wayne's army remained three days near the battlefield and destroyed the cornfields situated at Maumee Rapids. Wayne reported that the Miami had about two thousand warriors in the fight near the British garrison.

On September 4, 1794, the army under Wayne again set out for the Miami village at the head of the Maumee River and arrived here on the seventeenth. On the eighteenth Wayne selected the site of the fort. On October 22, 1794, it was completed and christened Fort Wayne by Colonel John F. Hamtramck, who was placed in command of the garrison. On the twenty-eighth of October, Wayne and his legion left Fort Wayne and went to Fort Greenville, Ohio.

On the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth of December, the chiefs of several tribes, including the Miami, came with peace messages

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..COMPLETED AND CHRISTENED FORT WAYNE..

to Colonel Hamtramck at Fort Wayne. On January 24, 1795, they entered into preliminary articles with Wayne at Greenville. The articles were concluded by treaty at a conference lasting from June 16 to August 7, 1795. Thereafter, peace, instead of war, reigned over the historic confluence of the St. Joseph and the St. Mary's rivers.

FORT WAYNE DAILY GAZETTE, August 5, 9, 1879

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